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Proceedings of the Royal Society. Nos. 52, 53.

Supplementary Appendix to the Report of the Poor Law Commissioners of the Medical Charities in Ireland, with Indexes. 1841. Presented by the Commissioners.

A pamphlet entitled, "Is Selenium a true Element?" Presented by Septimus Piesse.

November 30. (Stated Meeting.)

SIR W^M. R. HAMILTON, LL.D., President, in the Chair.

John Anster, LL.D., was elected a member of the Committee of Polite Literature, in the room of the Rev. Dr. Porter, who had resigned.

RESOLVED,—On the recommendation of Council,—That Mr. E. Curry be employed to make a Catalogue of the Irish MSS. in the Library of the Academy, for the sum of £100.

The Secretary read a letter from George Birch, Esq., presenting to the Academy an ancient tombstone, from the Abbey of Monahinchy, with an inscription in the Irish character.

RESOLVED,—That the thanks of the Academy be given to Mr. Birch for his donation.

Rev. Dr. Todd, V.P., gave the following account of the Proceedings of the Committee for the purchase of the late Dean of St. Patrick's collection of Irish Antiquities, which had been recently presented to the Academy.

"It has been thought fitting that some record should appear in the Proceedings of the Academy of the successful efforts that have been made under the direction of the Committee of Antiquities, for raising the subscription, which has preserved from dispersion, and

placed in the safe keeping of this Society the invaluable Collection of Irish antiquities belonging to our late lamented Vice-President, the Dean of St. Patrick's.

“It was well known to all his intimate friends that one of the principal motives that influenced him in the formation of his Museum, next to the zeal for the preservation and study of antiquities which characterized him, was a wish to have his collection preserved for public use, under the care of the Royal Irish Academy.

“As soon as it was ascertained, therefore, that he had died intestate, and consequently without making any provision for carrying these his often expressed wishes into effect, many of his personal friends, knowing how deeply he would have deprecated the dispersion of his Collection, felt anxious, were it only as a testimony of respect to his memory, that the Irish part at least of the Museum should be obtained for the Academy; and in this they were warmly seconded by all who were aware of the value of the Collection, and who felt the great importance of a National Museum of Antiquities to the study of our ancient history.

“Accordingly, at the Stated Meeting of the Academy in November, 1840, soon after the lamented death of the Dean, the subject was brought forward, and the Committee of Antiquities were requested to take immediate steps towards opening a subscription for the purchase of the Irish part of the collection.

“The Committee met immediately after, and their first act was to publish in the principal newspapers of Dublin a short address, for the purpose of ascertaining the state of public feeling on the subject. A circular was also prepared, and sent to the principal nobility and gentry of Ireland, to all in short, as far as they could be ascertained, who were thought likely to take an interest in the design.

“This was all that could be done at that time. The absence of Mrs. Dawson on the Continent, and the consequent difficulty of ascertaining the wishes of the Dean's family, rendered it impossible to discover what sum they were likely to accept for that portion of the Museum which the Committee were commissioned to purchase, or indeed whether they would consent at all to separate the Irish part of the Collection from the rest.

“ From this unavoidable delay, the zeal of many appeared to cool, and the subscription for a time proceeded but slowly; but at length, on the 27th of March, 1841, the Committee took the bold step of authorizing Mr. Petrie and Dr. Aquilla Smith to offer £1000 for the Collection.

“ I should have mentioned that this sum was decided upon after an exact valuation of the whole. The coins were valued by Dr. Aquilla Smith, and the other antiquities, at Mrs. Dawson’s special request, by Mr. Petrie; and the sum at which these gentlemen fixed the value of the Collection was £1060. The Committee were of opinion, therefore, that in offering the sum of £1000, they were dealing fairly with the public fund entrusted to them; while by striking off about six per cent. from the amount of the valuation, they were only allowing for the necessary expenses which would have attended the sale of the Museum had it been submitted to a public auction.

“ It was not, however, until the 26th of June following that a final answer was obtained from the Dean’s family to the proposal of the Committee. On that day Dr. Smith reported that Mrs. Dawson had consented to accept the offered sum, and also that she was willing to allow three months from that date for its collection.

“ New efforts were then made by the Committee: circulars were again sent out, and an address to the public was inserted in the newspapers; a deputation was appointed to wait on His Excellency the Lord Lieutenant, who contributed £20 to the fund; and in short every exertion was made to rouse the friends of Ireland to the importance of the great national object that was in view.

“ The success that has crowned these efforts is mainly owing to the zealous manner in which the exertions of the Committee were seconded by some other members of the Academy, who aided them by their advice and counsel, and also by their invaluable and indefatigable labours. Of these it is impossible to avoid naming Mr. Carr and Mr. Hutton, as the individuals to whose cooperation the Committee were most deeply indebted for the success of their undertaking; and although it is obviously improper to allude to any individual of those who were members of the Committee itself, yet I feel sure I shall be pardoned in departing from strict propriety so

far as to say, that to the exertions of Dr. Aquilla Smith and Mr. Petrie, their intimate knowledge of the contents and value of the Collection, and their good offices with the family of the Dean, the Academy and the country are mainly indebted for the possession of the treasures which have been added to our Museum.

“ Still, however, the subscriptions for some time came in so slowly, that it became necessary to solicit more time for collecting the money than was originally agreed upon; and this request was acceded to by Mrs. Dawson, with a liberality for which she deserves the gratitude and the thanks of the Academy.

“ At length on the 9th of April of the present year, the first instalment of £500 was paid to Mrs. Dawson, and the Collection was soon after removed to the Academy House, under the superintendence of Dr. Aquilla Smith.

“ A guarantee for the payment of the remaining half of the purchase money having been given to Mrs. Dawson by certain subscribers to the fund, the Antiquities were at first placed under the custody of those gentlemen; who bound themselves to hand over the Collection to the Committee as soon as the debt for which they had made themselves responsible was discharged.

“ On the 31st May the whole remainder of the purchase money was paid to Mrs. Dawson, and the gentlemen who had so liberally come forward to guarantee its discharge were released from their obligation. It was found also, that after the payment of all the incidental expenses, a balance remained at that time in favour of the fund to the amount of £24 17s. 6d. This balance was subsequently increased by some subscriptions that afterwards came in, and the whole overplus has been applied, under the direction of the Committee, to the purchase of some valuable antiquities, which have been added to the Collection.

“ In recording this last stage of the proceedings of the Committee it is necessary to remark, that but for the public spirit of the individuals who came forward to give their personal security to Mrs. Dawson for the payment of the purchase money, all would have been lost, and the Museum would necessarily have been sent for public sale to London. For although at that time the stipulated sum had been very nearly promised, yet many of those who had put

down their names had not paid their subscriptions, and the time necessary for collecting the money would have exceeded the limit to which the Committee had bound themselves to Mrs. Dawson; and thus she would have been left at liberty to take other means for disposing of the Museum. It is necessary, therefore, that the Academy should know that the gentlemen who came forward to rescue the Committee from a dilemma which would have made vain all their previous exertions, and to whom we are therefore so particularly indebted for the great step that has been made towards the formation of a National Museum, are George Carr, Esq., Dr. Aquilla Smith, Professor Mac Cullagh, Thomas Hutton, Esq., and Robert Callwell, Esq.

“ The thanks of the Academy are also due to Mr. Clibborn for his invaluable services throughout the whole of these transactions, and particularly in the last stage of them, when it became necessary to make exertions to call in the subscriptions that had been promised, and to take steps, after the Museum had come into our possession, for the arrangement and safe keeping of its contents. To him also we are indebted for the ingenious plan for a new Board Room, which has received the approval of the Council, and is submitted to your consideration this evening: a plan which will enable us to convert the room in which we are now assembled into a Museum, where the treasures of which we are now the guardians, may be displayed in a manner useful to the public, and their permanent security duly provided for.

“ The special thanks of the Academy are also due to Messrs. Boyle, Low, Pim, and Co., who kindly permitted subscriptions to be paid at their house, without any charge whatsoever to the fund; and who also offered to advance to the Committee any sum that might be required as a temporary accommodation, during the necessary delay that attended the collection of the subscriptions. This liberal offer the Committee were compelled to avail themselves of, by drawing upon Messrs. Boyle and Co. for a sum of £53 15s. 5d. on the 1st of June last, a sum which was not entirely repaid for upwards of two months afterwards.

“ It is proper to mention here, that His Excellency Earl De Grey, in addition to his subscription to the fund for the purchase of

the Dawson Collection, has also been pleased to present to the Academy a valuable Aision of gold, which was recently found in the county of Roscommon, and of which His Excellency became the purchaser, for the express purpose of placing it in our Museum. Mr. H. J. Monck Mason also, in addition to his subscription, presented a very beautiful gold Fibula, of considerable weight and value.

“ It should be distinctly understood, that the subscriptions received have enabled the Committee to pay all the expenses attendant upon these transactions, without any charge whatsoever to the funds of the Academy.

“ The Academy, as a body, have had nothing whatsoever to do with the purchase of the Museum, and there will be found among the subscribers very many names of gentlemen who are not members of, or in any way connected with our Society. The Museum, therefore, strictly speaking, is the property of the subscribers, and is by them presented to the Academy, to be kept by us in trust, for the benefit of the public. The Academy, as a Corporation, have contributed nothing to the purchase, except so far as their consenting to take the charge of so valuable a gift, and to provide a room for its exhibition, may be considered, as it doubtless is, a most important contribution to the great end which the subscribers have had in view.

“ The accounts of the Committee have been audited by Messrs. Callwell and Hutton; they are in the hands of Mr. Clibborn, and are open, of course, to the inspection of any of the contributors.

“ It may be well now to say a few words on the value and contents of the Museum of which we are thus become the guardians.

“ The Museum contains no less than ninety-seven ornaments of solid gold, whose total weight amounts to 98 oz. 14½ dwt. It possesses also 252 articles of pure silver, and 1674 bronzes and other antiques, composed of pottery, amber, glass, and the baser metals.

“ This enumeration does not include the coins and medals, which are of singular interest and value, and of which a catalogue, in the handwriting of Dean Dawson, is now on the table.

“ To specify the various articles of value and interest more particularly, so far at least as to give any detailed account of them, would be too great a trespass on your time, even if I could feel my-

self fully competent to the task ; but it is impossible to close this Report without endeavouring to give you some rough and general view at least of the treasure which we have now obtained.

“ Among the gold ornaments are twenty-seven fibulæ, one of them of considerable size; three perfect torques, and fragments of some others; two gorgets; two singular hollow balls or beads of gold, which were found with eleven others in the County of Roscommon, and which the Dean saved from the crucible of the goldsmith; a most interesting collection of ancient finger rings, and sixteen specimens of the small solid rings of gold, which are believed to have been the current money of the ancient inhabitants of Ireland.

“ The collection of silver finger rings and of ancient seals, is of great interest and value. Among them will be found the matrices of the seals of the O’Neills and other Irish chiefs, with several ecclesiastical seals of various periods.

“ There is a remarkable collection of the ancient Irish bells, whose uses and history our friend Mr. Petrie has so ably discussed; some of these are the large bells, which once, perhaps, were suspended in the Round Towers; others are the small altar bells, many of them exhibiting proofs of great antiquity. One of the large bells contains an Irish inscription, which proves it to be as old as the ninth century.

“ The collection of military weapons and other antiques connected with the warfare of our ancestors is of great extent and value. It contains a great variety of specimens, in excellent preservation, of the flint arrow heads and spear heads, which are supposed to have been the most ancient weapons in use in Ireland; a large number of the peculiar weapon, in stone and bronze, called celts, of all the sizes and forms in which they are found; and a magnificent collection of swords and spear heads, from many of the remarkable fields of battle recorded in the history of Ireland.

“ It would be drawing too much on your patience to enter more particularly into a description of particular objects of interest in this Collection; at some future time it might perhaps be an entertaining, as well as an instructive task (if some of our antiquaries would undertake it), to exhibit to the Academy, from time to time,

the more remarkable and important articles of our Museum, with remarks on their history, and use. But a more fitting occasion for this will perhaps be found, when THE DAWSON COLLECTION is properly arranged and displayed, as I hope it soon will be, in a room fitted for its reception.

“ I must say a few words of the coins and medals before I can conclude this Report.

“ They may be divided into three classes :

“ 1. *The Danish Irish coins of the ninth and tenth centuries.*

“ This series comprehends the coins of Domnald and some of the sovereigns unknown ; a coin of Ivar, A. D. 872, and a large collection of the Dublin coins of Sitric, A. D. 980 and 989. Also the Dublin coins of Æthelred, and some of great singularity and rarity, which bear the impress of the Dublin mint, and which the Dean, on grounds however admitted by himself to be doubtful, was at one time disposed to refer to the reign of Æthelstan.

“ 2. *The coins struck in and for Ireland by British sovereigns.*

“ Among these are a magnificent series of the coins of John, minted in Dublin, Waterford, and Limerick, between the years 1177 and 1199 ; and a singularly perfect series of the coins struck in Ireland from the reign of John to that of George IV., containing many varieties of great rarity and value.

“ 3. *A series of medals struck in Ireland.*

“ The most complete that has ever been collected. This series is particularly interesting to the Academy, because the late Dean, a very short time before his decease, contributed to our Transactions a valuable paper on the subject of Irish Medals, in which the most remarkable of these very medals are noticed and described.

“ On the whole, I would congratulate the Academy, and not the Academy only, but the country, on the possession of this important and invaluable Collection. As one of those who enjoyed the privilege of an intimate acquaintance with its late lamented owner, I cannot help expressing the gratification which I feel in the reflection that this, the national part of his Museum, is saved from dispersion, secured to Ireland, and presented to the Academy, for which he had destined it. I feel a melancholy satisfaction, in which his

friends will sympathize with me, in having (in however humble a degree) taken a part in bringing about the fulfilment of the wish I have often heard him utter, that his Museum might be here; and in the assurance that here his name will live as a benefactor to his country, and an example to our gentry, by whom the study and preservation of our antiquities have been (I must say) disgracefully neglected.

“ But on public grounds, most of all, I would congratulate the Academy on having now laid the foundation of a National Museum, which will doubtless be the means of preserving many articles of value and interest from destruction—of bringing together the many curious relics of the past, which are now in the hands of private families or individuals, and perhaps also of awakening the attention of the Government of the country, to the importance (too long forgotten or overlooked) of forming, upon a liberal and extensive basis, a really National Museum of the Antiquities of Ireland.”

RESOLVED,—That this Report be entered on the Minutes, and published in the Proceedings.

RESOLVED,—That the special thanks of the Academy be given to those subscribers to the Dawson Fund who are not members of the Academy.*

RESOLVED,—On the recommendation of Council,—That the plan of the new Board Room proposed by Mr. Murray and Mr. Owen, be approved of by the Academy.

December 12.

SIR W^M. R. HAMILTON, LL.D., President, in the Chair.

Rev. Dr. Todd, V. P. on the part of the Knight of Glin, presented to the Academy a gold coin, with an Arabic inscription, found in the wall of a house in the townland of Killeny, near Glin.

* See List of Subscribers in Appendix No. I.